

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2022 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Jason Savage (Chair); Councillors Albon, Ara, Ashbee, Austin, Bailey, Bambridge, J Bayford, R Bayford, Boyd, Braidwood, Coleman-Cooke, Crittenden, Currie, Day, Dennis, Dexter, Duckworth, Everitt, Fellows, Garner, Gregory, Hart, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Kup, Leys, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, Anne-Marie Nixey, Ovenden, L Piper, Rev. S Piper, Pugh, Rawf, Rogers, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders, Scobie, Scott, Shonk, Shrubb, Smith, Tomlinson, Towing, Wallin, Wing and Yates.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Farrance, Parsons, Potts, Rattigan, Whitehead, Wright.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair proposed, the Vice Chair seconded and Members agreed the minutes of the Council meeting held on 24 February 2022.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair congratulated Councillor Nixey on her recent election on behalf of the Council.

Members were reminded that the Extraordinary Meeting of Council scheduled for 5 April 2022 would start at 6pm.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PETITIONS

No petitions were received in accordance with council procedure rule 12.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

(a) QUESTION NO.1 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE IDENTIFICATION OF BROWNFIELD SITES FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS.

Ms McCourt asked the Leader the following question:

"We know the algorithm for projected housing figures is wrong BUT what is TDC doing to press further on the identification of brownfield sites for developments, rather than digging up our prime farmland? Whilst I appreciate perhaps the approach for the Local Plan is to "ask for sites to be put forward for development," I ask why are Council Officers not being pro-active in approaching owners of brownfield sites? If it is not 'normal practice' then will Council Officers look towards changing this practice, particularly in light of the fact that we need our farmland for food growth/production and not houses which we do not need?"

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The tests for site allocation in Government guidance were “availability, suitability and achievability,” this meant that landowners had to be willing for their sites to be brought forward; they must be suitable in planning terms; and be capable of being delivered within the Plan period.
- The call for sites was just one part of the process to identify land for residential and other development. Another part of the process was to carry out desk and site surveys to identify other sites (including brownfield sites) that met the site allocation criteria above. In cases where sites met the criteria above, the landowners were contacted to see what their intentions were for the sites in question.
- This approach had been standard practice for many years. This work was carried out for the adopted Plan, and was being undertaken at the moment to inform the Local Plan update.
- The Leader had recently spent an afternoon reviewing the list of brownfield sites and would continue to review the list regularly.

(b) **QUESTION NO.2 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE IDENTIFICATION OF BROWNFIELD SITES FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS.**

Ms Brown asked the Leader the following question:

“Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine people are becoming increasingly anxious about current and future food security because of that region’s importance in the global supply of grains such as wheat. Allowing the development of prime productive farmland in Thanet (that also grows wheat), will decrease our ability to grow food in this country adding to reliance on food imports. We already import 40-50% of our food. In light of this and the government’s emphasis on using brownfield for development instead of greenfields. Can you tell me are you required to actively search for brownfield sites, and if you are, what are you doing to fulfil this requirement?”

The Leader responded with the following points:

- The Leader agreed that Ukraine and Russia were the breadbasket of Europe.
- The response to the question from Ms McCourt was also applicable to this question.
- There was not an absolute protection for agricultural land in Government guidance. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) said that “Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality”.
- The Council would ask the Government to reconsider the framework to further protect agricultural land in light of the increased pressure on food supply caused by the war in Ukraine.

(c) **QUESTION NO.3 FROM A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC TOILETS**

The questioner was unable to attend the meeting, therefore the question would be responded to in writing.

7. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

(a) **QUESTION NO. 1 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THANET’S HERITAGE THEATRES.**

Councillor Gregory asked Councillor Pugh the following question:

"Many of Thanet's heritage of theatre venues that have, in the past, attracted large audiences & are either closed, now derelict due to lack of routine maintenance or are imminent to shut, possibly lost to the Thanet & its visiting community forever.

What plans does TDC have for Westcliff concert hall in Ramsgate, the Granville Theatre Ramsgate, the Theatre Royal Margate & the Winter Gardens Margate for them to be restored to their former glory?"

Councillor Pugh responded with the following points:

- The Granville Theatre on Victoria Parade, Ramsgate, was built in the 1940s, originally as a theatre, with a cinema screen added later. The Theatre was owned by the Council, but had been managed by leaseholders since 1998. The building was leased to Granville Theatre Ltd in 2007, but that arrangement came to an end in November 2020, when the lease was surrendered. The building has been closed since the start of the national COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.
- The building was last surveyed in 2017 and this highlighted an extensive list of necessary maintenance, with a total cost estimated at £152,000. In addition to this, the roof was in a particularly poor condition and repairs were estimated to cost around £250,000.
- In July 2021, members of Thanet District Council's Cabinet agreed to transfer the Granville Theatre into the hands of a community organisation, if a viable bid was put forward. In October 2021, community groups were invited to express their interest in bidding for the freehold of the building, and the right to continue to operate it. Commercial property agents would shortly be offering the building on the open market, inviting proposals that reflected the status, condition and future use of the property. Eligible community groups, including the Kent Film Foundation, would have the opportunity to bid alongside commercial organisations.
- The Granville Theatre held fond memories for many local people and was a distinctive local landmark. It was encouraging to see the huge amount of positive local support for its redevelopment. The Council was committed to securing a positive future for the building, which would benefit the local community for generations to come.
- Westcliff Hall in Ramsgate was in private ownership and therefore not a matter the Council could comment on beyond sharing a view that we very much want to see it developed positively.
- The Theatre Royal formed part of the Margate Town Deal. Within the Town Deal Scaling Creative Production and Skills intervention, there was a £2m allocation for the Theatre Royal project. The Town Investment Plan stated that this would be used to improve the Theatre Royal and surrounding environment, to create a new hub of theatrical production. This project would:
 - Go beyond capital improvements and reimagine the Theatre Royal to ensure a sustainable future.
 - Safeguard this heritage asset, and provide opportunities for the local community to become part of the town and district's growth within creative production.
 - Ensure that more people, from a diverse range of backgrounds had an involvement in or enjoyment of creative production.
 - Improve the local economy, including the night time economy, diversify the visitor experience, and create jobs and training opportunities.
 - Require a new operator and coalition of interested parties to enable the theatre to thrive commercially and for the benefit of the community.
 - Support capital works to repair and restore the theatre to enable a sustainable future for the building and its communities.
- The Margate Town Deal Board has asked the Government for revenue funding to support the Margate Winter Gardens in the development of a long-term plan. As a result, there was now £300,000 of revenue funding allocated for the Winter Gardens project.
- This funding would enable a piece of work which would provide a clear vision and detailed project delivery plan for the Winter Gardens' future, including how it

could operate in tandem with the other leisure venues and key heritage assets in Margate, such as Dreamland and the Theatre Royal.

Councillor Gregory followed up her question by asking why had regular routine maintenance not taken place on these buildings?

Councillor Pugh responded that the Council wished to see these assets returned back to their former glory, however the Council's budget was tight. It should not always be the job of the Council to renovate premises if there was a community group that could bring the property back to its former glory, or even better.

(b) **QUESTION NO. 2 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE ALLOCATION OF A TRAVELLERS SITE.**

Councillor Rawf asked the Leader the following question:

"Travellers issues have been ongoing for some time, the working party has been set up for nearly 2 years to allocate a place for them, can the Leader reassure us we will hear the results soon?"

The Leader responded with the following points:

- It was decided that suitable sites for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation should be identified through the Local Plan process.
- The site search and allocation process for the Local Plan update was being undertaken at the moment. The tests for site allocation were "availability, suitability and achievability", which meant that landowners had to be willing for their sites to be brought forward; they must be suitable in planning terms (across a range of matters); and be capable of delivery within the Plan period.
- No sites were proposed to the Council specifically for consideration as Gypsy and Traveller sites, which meant that the site search work had to be extended.

Councillor Rawf followed up his question by asking if the Leader could find a solution for the families at the Port of Ramsgate.

The Leader responded that she could help those families by finding a long term solution and site. It was a priority to find a stopping and permanent site. The Council had bid for funding that, if successful, could offer a solution in the future.

(c) **QUESTION NO. 3 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE PIER YARD TOILETS**

Councillor Everitt asked Councillor Kup the following question:

"Can the cabinet member flush away rumours that the future of the Pier Yard toilets, which provide the main public conveniences for Ramsgate Main Sands, is in doubt? Is this Conservative administration, which has no Ramsgate councillors on its front bench, considering pulling the chain on them?"

Councillor Kup responded with the following points:

- A decision on the future of all the toilets across the District needed to be taken, and a strategy to deal with the issue was being developed that covered a range of options. Any proposal would go to Cabinet for a decision.
- The Cabinet worked for the benefit of the whole district.

Councillor Everitt followed up his question by asking what people should do in future if all the public conveniences in the vicinity were shut?

Councillor Kup advised that he could not answer that.

(d) **QUESTION NO. 4 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE GRANVILLE THEATRE, RAMSGATE**

Councillor Austin asked Councillor Pugh the following question:

"In light of the confusion and upset over the future of Ramsgate's Granville Theatre, I'd be grateful if you could clarify the current situation and our process as a Council going forward.

In your helpful responses to residents who've expressed concern, understandably you've stressed our need to ensure best value. Sadly, 'best value' in Ramsgate to date has consistently been interpreted as sale to the highest bidder, leaving important buildings like Westcliff Hall, the Western Undercliff Café and 18 Albert Street derelict, generating significant negative ongoing value for residents and our visitor economy.

We were delighted to see the Granville featured as a key attraction in our Regeneration Team's recently published Ramsgate Future plan. Could you please outline the process we will follow for this important asset from now on, and explain what we are doing to ensure the Granville elements of the Ramsgate Future plan can still be delivered?"

Councillor Pugh responded with the following points:

- Some of the response would be the same as the response to Councillor Gregory's question.
- In July 2021, members of Thanet District Council's Cabinet agreed to transfer the Granville Theatre into the hands of a community organisation, if a viable bid was put forward. In October 2021, community groups were invited to express their interest in bidding for the freehold of the building, and the right to continue to operate it. A submission from the Kent Film Foundation (KFF) was received which was considered by a panel of officers from across the Council. The submission was scored in strict accordance with the Community Asset Transfer Policy.
- The Council had a duty to residents to make sure that any community group wanting to take on a public building could evidence that they had the skills and experience required, and that the project had a long term future that would benefit the wider community.
- Unfortunately the KFF submission did not provide adequate designs or costings for the refurbishment of the building, lacked proof of funding and a realistic business plan. Supporting information for other requirements, including an inclusion and diversity policy, were also missing. In addition, some key elements of the proposal were at risk of not receiving planning permission due to a required change of use application for a building of listed status.
- Commercial property agents would shortly be offering the building on the open market, inviting proposals that reflected the status, condition and future use of the property. Eligible community groups, including the Kent Film Foundation, would have the opportunity to bid alongside commercial organisations.

Councillor Austin followed up her question by asking if Cabinet were committed to keeping the future of the building as an entertainment venue?

Councillor Pugh responded that Cabinet were committed to achieve the best future for the building, this could be private ownership or ownership by a community group.

(e) **QUESTION NO. 5 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING DISABLED PARKING BAYS**

The questioner was unable to attend the meeting, therefore the question would be responded to in writing.

(f) **QUESTION NO. 6 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING REQUIREMENTS FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS**

The questioner was unable to attend the meeting, therefore the question would be responded to in writing.

(g) **QUESTION NO. 7 FROM A MEMBER REGARDING THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT FUTURE OF THE GRANVILLE THEATRE, RAMSGATE**

Councillor Crittenden asked Councillor Pugh the following question:

"Has the leader noted the extent of public concern in Ramsgate and beyond about the future of the Granville Theatre? What steps is she taking to address this concern and reassure the public that her administration is listening to what local people obviously want."

Councillor Pugh responded with the following points:

- The Leader and Cabinet had listened to the views of local people regarding the Granville Theatre which was why, in July 2021, the Cabinet agreed to transfer the Granville Theatre into the hands of a community organisation, if a viable bid was put forward.
- The Council had a duty to residents to make sure that any community group that wanted to take on a public building could provide the evidence that it had the skills and experience to do so, and that the project had a long term future that would benefit the wider community.
- The Cabinet recognised that the Granville Theatre holds fond memories for many local people and that residents were concerned about its future.
- It was encouraging to see the huge amount of positive local support for its redevelopment.
- The Council was committed to securing a positive future for the building, which would benefit the local community for generations to come.
- It was important that the Council did not sit on assets and do nothing with them, therefore if a community group or private individual could do better than the Council with an asset that the Council owned, then that should be made a reality.

Councillor Crittenden followed up her question by asking for confirmation that the premises would not end up as flats, a supermarket or a derelict site?

Councillor Pugh responded that there were conditions that could be stipulated within a sale agreement to restrict the future use of an asset. He confirmed that a condition would be included in the sale to ensure that the premises could not be used for residential development. The Council was committed to achieving the best outcome for the premises and the wider community.

8. NOTICE OF MOTION

There were no motions on notice in accordance with council procedure rule 3.

9. LEADERS REPORT

The Leader, Councillor Ashbee, presented her report to Council, covering the following key points:

- Members were asked to take a moment to think about those suffering in Ukraine. The Council stood in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and was committed to playing its part in supporting refugee families.
- The final Ramsgate Heritage Action Zone initiative, Seafront Place Making, had reached its final year, and would explore what Ramsgate meant to the local community.
- The Government had approved the establishment of the Margate Creative Land Trust that would support and grow creative practices for the local community.
- The first community tree planting event took place at Jackey Bakers, Ramsgate as part of the Queen's Green Canopy project.

- Lord Deben visited the King George Memorial Park in Garlinge as part of a national tour to see what different parts of the Country were doing to meet ambitious climate goals.
- Thanet was leading the way on business and resident digital communications, including:
 - The Green Tourism Tool Kit helped businesses with ideas to become more environmentally friendly.
 - The Online Waste Portal would allow residents to access real time information about bin collections and allow residents to report issues.
 - The Open Portal was a new and secure online portal that enabled residents and businesses to manage their council tax and business rates accounts, housing benefit claims, payment history and other services, all in one place.
- The fourth edition of Action Against Litter had been published and gave details of the three day, district wide, spring clean event that would take place during the first week of April. Thanks were offered to the litter picking volunteers for their efforts throughout the year.
- A 'How to Become a Councillor' event would be held to offer information to anyone thinking of becoming a District Councillor in the future.
- Residents of Margate would have received correspondence about Margate's bid to have a town council. If the petition to form a town council received enough signatures, a community governance review would be triggered.

Councillor Everitt as Leader of the Labour Group made the following points in response to the Leader's report:

- It was hoped that bureaucracy would not obstruct residents in Thanet from supporting Ukrainian refugees.
- The 'How to Become a Councillor' event was fully supported. There was a need to reach underrepresented groups, such as younger residents and people living in social housing. The low basic Councillor allowance could be one of the factors that stopped people from relatively deprived backgrounds, and young people, from becoming a District Councillor.
- Members could encourage others, from all backgrounds, to become Councillors by being visible in their wards, showing that they could make difference, and by being honest about the difficult decisions the Council had to make regardless of who was in control.
- The success of the Margate Creative Land Trust, the tree planting at Jackey Bakers, and the upcoming litter picking events, were all welcome news.
- It was a challenge to maintain the streets and open spaces throughout the year, the littering culture must be challenged.
- The real test of the new digital waste system would be if improvements were seen in how quickly the Council reacted when notified of a problem.
- If Margate residents supported the creation of a town council, the area would benefit from more autonomy and the ability to deliver hyper local initiatives, however there would be a Council Tax charge for this. Residents of Margate could look at the good example set by Ramsgate Town Council.

The Leader replied to Councillor Everitt's comments with the following point:

- There needed to be more young Councillors. The basic Councillor allowance was an issue, a small amount of budget would be put aside for the next couple of years to allow the basic allowance to be increased a bit in the future.

Councillor Rev. Piper as Leader of the Thanet Independent Group made the following points in response to the Leader's report:

- Could the Council make a clear statement regarding the gas and electrical safety checks and any other checks required by the Council, for residents who wished to become sponsors for those travelling from Ukraine?

- The Jackey Bakers tree planting event was good and was well supported. Ramsgate Town Council were looking to plant more trees, could there be a meeting to discuss the continuation of the avenue of trees around the Jackey Bakers field?
- The online waste portal would be good in the end, however some residents in Buxton Road and Hyberry Gardens had gone six weeks without a proper collection. Could this be investigated?
- The Thanet Independent Group have done their best to support the 'How to Become a Councillor' event on social media, and hoped it would be a successful evening.

The Leader replied to Councillor Rev. Piper's comments with the following points:

- The Council had a dedicated webpage relating to the Ukraine crisis, the page contained lots of useful information and would be updated to include the checks and procedures for households wishing to take in refugees.
- The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Special Projects would meet with Councillor Piper to discuss the planting of trees at Jackey Bakers.
- It was often the case that there were teething issues when a new system was introduced, however once these issues were resolved the online waste portal would allow the Council to provide a better service than it had provided in the past.

Councillor Garner as Leader of the Green Party made the following points in response to the Leader's report:

- It was a welcome sight to see the Ukrainian flag flying over the Council Offices to demonstrate the Council's solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and it was heartening to see the donations of Thanet's residents that would go to help the relief effort.
- The recent tree planting events have been good to see, thanks were offered to the officers who had ensured that as many trees as possible were planted.
- The existing trees must also be protected, Members sitting on the Climate Emergency Cabinet Advisory Group received a stark update on the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, about the urgency for action to meet the pledge to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.
- The King George V park works had reduced the risk of surface flooding, however more work may be required if thousands more houses were built in the Westgate and Garlinge area.
- The digital technology projects were good, it was important that the Council made more information readily available to residents online, however residents who did not use computers should not be put at a disadvantage.
- As many people as possible should attend the 'How to Become a Councillor Event'. There was a need for more people who wanted to participate in local democracy to get involved, as it was the best way to effect positive change across the community.
- The Great British Spring Clean was an example of how residents come together to clean their neighbourhood. There were a number of litter picks planned for the next few weeks.

The Leader replied to Councillor Garner's comments noting that:

- It was important to look after the trees that had been planted, in order to pass them on to the next generation.
- The landscaping at the George V Park was a vast improvement to what was there before. There were plans for similar projects at two more sites within the District.

Members noted the report.

10. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Councillor Reverend Piper presented the report as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, he noted that the Panel had been busy during the year and offered his thanks to Members and Officers for their support, and to the Cabinet Members who had made presentations.

Councillor Reverend Piper encouraged Members to look at Article 6 of the Council's Constitution for an explanation of the role of the Panel, and reminded Members to contact him if they had any topics for review.

Members noted the report.

11. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Mr Tucker, the Chair of the Standards Committee, presented his report.

Members noted the report.

12. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Councillor Boyd, Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee, presented the report. She noted that the Committee had continued to discharge its responsibilities to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and the associated control environment, and it had provided robust scrutiny and challenge of the Authority's financial performance.

Councillor Boyd offered her thanks to the Members serving on the Committee and Sub-Committee, and to the Officers for their support.

The Council had also faced the challenge of receiving the Statutory Recommendations made by Grant Thornton under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. Work to address those recommendations was ongoing and Members and Officers were cooperating fully with the work of the Independent Monitoring Officer, Mr Baker.

Members noted the report.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STANDARDS COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COUNCIL

It was proposed by the Chair and the Vice-Chair seconded, that the recommendations as detailed in the report be adopted, namely:

"That Council amend the Council Procedure Rules as follows, which is in accordance with the recommendations of CRWP and Standards Committee:

1. Council Procedure Rule 14.6 - That the bullet point '- related to a matter which has already been raised as a Standards Complaint against a member and which has not yet been concluded through the Code of Conduct procedures.' be added to the list of reasons that would invalidate a question.

2. Council Procedure Rule 14.8 - That the following sentence be added at the end of the existing paragraph: 'The question must be a question and not a statement, and arise directly out of the response.'

Councillor Everitt proposed and Councillor Rawf seconded an amendment that removed the last seven words of recommendation two.

After some debate the following amended motion was put to the vote and declared carried:

"That Council amend the Council Procedure Rules as follows, which is in accordance with the recommendations of CRWP and Standards Committee:

1. Council Procedure Rule 14.6 - That the bullet point ' - related to a matter which has already been raised as a Standards Complaint against a member and which has not yet been concluded through the Code of Conduct procedures.' be added to the list of reasons that would invalidate a question.

2. Council Procedure Rule 14.8 - That the following sentence be added at the end of the existing paragraph: 'The question must be a question and not a statement.'

14. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STANDARDS COMMITTEE - REVISION TO DELEGATIONS

The Chair proposed, the Vice-Chair seconded and Members agreed the recommendation as set out in the report, namely:

"That the Council amends its scheme of delegations by delegating to the Chief Executive and in her absence the Director of Law and Democracy) the authority to declare vacancies in office under section 86 of the Local Government Act 1972."

15. RAMSGATE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

The Leader proposed, Councillor R Bayford seconded and Members agreed the recommendation as set out in the report, namely:

"To seek approval for the adoption of the Ramsgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan documents containing locally specific information of the area, following public consultation in November/December 2021."

16. CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, PANELS AND BOARDS

Proportionality

Members noted that the existing political balance of committees would remain unchanged.

Nominations to Serve on Committees.

The Leader advised that Councillor Shrubbs would sit on Planning Committee, Councillor Leys would sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the Governance and Audit Committee, and Councillor Pugh would come off the Governance and Audit Committee.

Councillor Everitt advised that Councillor Currie would sit on the Licensing Board.

Meeting concluded : 8.15 pm